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Encounters with Phyllis

University of Nebraska at Kearney

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Encounters
with Phyllis

*A collection of letters compiled by the
University of Nebraska at Kearney
for Professor Emeritus Phyllis Roberts*

May 4, 2000

Fredric Abood '51 & Patricia Asher Abood '52

1485 Cambridge Road, Lansing, Michigan 48911-1006

Throughout my education, Phyllis Roberts was the first instructor, teacher, or professor that I honestly believed liked me. I enjoyed learning from her and studying Ralph Waldo Emerson, "*Walden Pond*" and all the giants of American literature.

If memory serves me correctly, I was fortunate to have had three or four classes within my college major in her company. Every class was wonderful. Miss Roberts was more of a friend, and yet she was in the hierarchy of academia.

My wife of almost 50 years, the former Patricia Louise Asher, also was a student at Kearney State Teachers College, now the University of Nebraska at Kearney. She majored in French, and I believe took all French courses with Miss Roberts, so Phyllis Roberts knew both of us well.

When Patricia and I became engaged and eventually were married, Phyllis Roberts made the following comment: As long as I have known those two, I never would have put them together. She was probably right, but we stuck it out only to prove her wrong.

Phyllis Roberts was our friend, our teacher, and our mentor. With her wonderful smile, the minute you met her, you felt close to her with the sense of an immediate relationship. I only regret that all teachers do not have Phyllis Roberts' wonderful qualities. She will always be in our hearts.

With fond memories, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Fredric and Patricia Abood

LeAnn Graybeal Rodehorst Ayres '70

1435 E 8th Street, Ogallala, Nebraska 69153-1724

Merci beaucoup et/y muchas gracias a Phyllis Roberts.

Phyllis Roberts was one of my French professors when I attended Kearney State College, now the University of Nebraska at Kearney. She was extremely influential in my life. Because of her encouragement and expertise, I changed my major from math to foreign languages. Soon after taking several French courses, I began also with Spanish. I remember fondly Phyllis and our French Honor Society meetings. I went to get my master's in Spanish from UNK and have taught Spanish and/or French since 1970. Phyllis also had a significant influence on my desire to travel. As a result, I have been to and studied in Mexico, and I have traveled to Europe several times. There have never been any personal regrets about my chosen profession, and I truly believe that, in part, this has been due to the wonderful lady, Phyllis Roberts. Again "MERCIET/Y GRACIAS." The statue is such a wonderful way to honor her commitment to students and teaching.

Sincerely,

LeAnn Graybeal Rodehorst Ayres

Dr. Betty Becker-Theye

286 Northport Avenue, Belfast, Maine 04915

I was privileged to teach with Phyllis Roberts for the first eight years of my now 33 years at UNK (then KSC). Phyllis and I shared many adventures and fun times, but I especially remember her for her encouragement of me to continue my academic and professional education. In fact, the year after her retirement, I did begin my Ph.D. program, always with her encouragement and support. Phyllis Roberts was a mentor to her students and colleagues long before the term became part of our workplace vocabulary. The sculpture of her outside Thomas Hall makes me happy each time I see it.

Betty Becker-Theye

Dr. Phyllis Carlson Conway

7500 South St. # 7, Lincoln, Nebraska 68506

To Phyllis from Phyllis,

You were the Phyllis who came to KSTC as an English instructor—and I was the Phyllis who was a sophomore English major who worked in the little office (on the second floor—north end) that year. I really don't recall what work I actually did—but I do recall your wonderful sense of humor, your relaxed but strong interest in all of your students, and the bantering in the office with Harry Hoffman—also new to KSTC.

How very special to have a statue on that special campus in your honor, and it will be special to see you.

Phyllis Carlson Conway

Dr. Neal P. Davis

3905 Colony Road, Portsmouth, Virginia 23703-3525

I was a student at UNK from 1956-1959. I fondly remember Phyllis Roberts from my three years of French, English, and Shakespeare. She was an excellent teacher, but more than that, I regarded her as a friend and confidant. She was approachable by any student and possessed a great sense of humor. I am pleased that she is being honored in such a way. There is no one more deserving.

Sincerely,

Neal P. Davis

*Barbara Andersen Deselms '62**919 Park Street, Trinidad, Colorado 81082-2312*

Dear Ms. Roberts,

As a 17-year-old college freshman from a small Nebraska school, I thought I could learn French by osmosis. (I sat in the front row!)

From French 100 I learned that:

1. French is a beautiful language.
2. I wanted to go to Europe, especially France.
3. A black dress with a white collar is chic.

Thank you, Ms. Roberts, for expanding my horizons.

Sincerely,

Barbara Andersen Deselms

Dr. Donald L. Deselms '52

828 Main Street, Chadron, Nebraska 69337-2658

Phyllis and I have been great friends for over fifty years.

In late May, 1948, immediately following graduation from Oxford High School, I enrolled in summer school at what was then known as Nebraska State Teachers College at Kearney.

After I finally found the classroom for English 190, I sat down in one of the front rows waiting for the action to begin. While sitting there in a state of mild terror, I noted this rather large, red haired young woman "sort of hanging around" the classroom door. My first impression was that she was probably a rural school teacher who was trying to gain a degree going to school summers following a program in Normal Training in high school.

But no! To my amazement she closed the door, walked to the front of the room, and away she went presenting the necessary orientation to the class in literature.

That class was the first of many. Most semesters that I attended college I had at least one class and sometimes more as I pursued a degree with majors in speech and English and a 20-plus semester hour minor in French.

I was on a scholarship and my mother (who was widowed with six children—two younger than I) was highly supportive of education and provided for her children at the cost of having little for herself, provided me with about twenty dollars a week out of the twenty-five that she earned. Money was a continuous worry and a guilt trip for me that my mother was sacrificing so much for me.

During that summer session I was able to get a job washing towels in the gym (provided for me through the influence of Duane Birt, a veteran of WW II and an Oxford native). When the athletes returned in the fall, the towel-washing job went back to them, and I was unemployed.

The fall semester I had no classes from Phyllis, but I saw her often in the library and around the second floor, north end of the Administration Building where most of my classes were held. She was very kind and seemed to take a personal interest in my well-being. During our conversations, it became evident to her that, without a part-time job, I would likely not complete a degree of any kind.

So, by the beginning of second semester, she had made finding me a job her high priority. As usual with Phyllis' determination, what she started to do she finished. Soon she had made arrangements with the hostess of the Fort Kearney Hotel dining room for an interview. I had done some restaurant work in high school and liked it fine, so Esther Juhl put me on part-time to help with luncheons, parties, and service club meetings at the rate of 99 cents per party. This then led to a regular job in the dining room four hours a day on school days and eight on week-ends.

Dr. Donald L. Deselms '52 ~ continued

As if this was not enough for Phyllis to do, she also encouraged those ladies from the college to ask for my tables or Ron Kenney's tables when dining at the Fort Kearney. Ron was also one of her students in a financial situation similar to mine. For the remainder of my college years, I worked at the Fort Kearney Hotel. However, once I was ensconced in the job and the financial worries were no longer, she did not cease to be interested in my life accomplishments.

While Phyllis was in Paris on a teacher exchange in 1950-1951, I enlisted in the Air Force at the end of the first semester as did many Kearney students. She was convinced that if she had been there I would not have done that without completing the degree. By this time she was giving me lots and lots of advice—some wanted some not, some followed some not.

She did not give up on me, but continued our friendship through frequent letters during the years I was in service. When I was fortunate enough to return to the campus in January, 1952, for a semester of Operation Bootstrap (on full military pay plus off-base rations) to complete the baccalaureate degree and moved from one of the neediest students on campus to one of the more affluent, again Phyllis was there to give encouragement, advice, and comment. She continued to bake cookies and in general "look after me." I continued to work at the Fort Kearney Hotel until graduation in the spring of 1952.

During the next two years while I was finishing my military obligation, I still had letters and packages from Phyllis, which were especially appreciated during the 12-month stint on Johnston Island in the South Pacific.

In September, 1954, I was discharged from the service, but it was too late to get a teaching job. I went to Lexington, Nebraska, where my wife had been teaching while I was in the military, but I was unemployed and bored. Phyllis made finding me employment her top priority.

By lucky chance, an opening appeared in Kearney Schools in the area of English and journalism. Phyllis organized a group consisting of Mrs. Mariam Drake, Miss Dorothy Klein, Miss Clara Johnson, and Dr. Harry Hoffman to promote me as an able candidate. They proceeded to make arrangements for me to have tutorage at the college in basic journalism, publishing a newspaper, and developing a yearbook. Again, this was a successful promotion that Phyllis organized on my behalf. From November 1, 1954, to May, 1961, I spent some of my most enjoyable years teaching at Kearney High School.

During those years in Kearney High, Phyllis continued to follow my career, and we visited often. She discovered that my mother had now raised her family but still needed a job. So she arranged for an interview for my mother with President Cushing for a job as a housemother in one of the dormitories. She also went with her to the interview. Of course, she got the job. Phyllis accomplishes what she sets out to do. My mother then stayed at that job until mandatory retirement.

Dr. Donald L. Deselms '52 ~ continued

I have been away from Kearney now for nearly 40 years. All of those years, Phyllis Roberts has followed my career and served as a cheerleader for my accomplishments.

The several years since her retirement she has faithfully written delightful, newsy letters to my wife and I at least twice a month, sometimes more often, keeping us informed about the activities of Kearney. Even of late, when her health has been falling, she has insisted that her niece, Allison, keep us informed of her condition when she was unable to do so herself.

Only recently she "advised me" that I would look much nicer with hair!

Could a teacher have done more? I think not. I will be forever grateful for the education I received at Kearney State and the resultant career in education. Much of the credit for that is due to those many kind people on the faculty who were so helpful – especially my dear friend, Phyllis Roberts.

Don Deselms
Professor Emeritus
Chadron State College

Jacques F. DuBois '63

3627 E. Park Road, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613-5482

Phyllis Roberts didn't waste much time playing a major role in my life. When I arrived in Kearney after receiving my degree from Grand Island Senior High, I had my mind set on being an architect. After attending classes for a few days, I found myself somewhat disappointed with my class in industrial arts. At the same time Phyllis Roberts had heard that there was a new student on the campus who was French. She quickly contacted me and encouraged me to sign up for French conversation. Since I was French, she felt that I could help out with the course. As it turned out, I ended up not only taking the course, but also teaching it under her supervision and getting a little stipend. My future in architecture had been derailed forever, and I soon found myself declaring a major in French and preparing for a career in teaching.

Phyllis Roberts' influence didn't stop there. Every semester Phyllis would walk me to different departments on the campus to introduce me to the teachers whose courses I was scheduled to take. Miss Roberts always found the time to help me. Since money was a little tight when I started school, Phyllis suggested that I could earn money by giving speeches on French agriculture. She was a popular speaker having given numerous speeches about France and her experiences traveling abroad. Over the years, Miss Roberts had become a frequent guest at many of the Rotary clubs within a 50-mile radius of Kearney. Making use of her numerous contacts, Phyllis decided that we were "ready for the road." The idea was quite scary at first for two reasons: first, my English was far from polished, and secondly, having been brought up in a ski resort in the Alps, my knowledge of French agriculture was nonexistent. Still, after much encouragement and a couple of trips to the library I was ready to accept my first speaking engagement. For the next two or three years the two of us made trips to surrounding small towns where I talked about my life in France and my experiences adjusting to living in the United States. Fortunately I was never questioned extensively about French farming methods and I welcomed the opportunity to earn twenty-five dollars and a free meal. During one of the trips, I recall telling Phyllis in French (she was talking my head off at the time) that she was a "pie jacasse," which means a "blabbering magpie." Thinking that I had called her a nasty name, Phyllis bopped me on the head. When I explained what I had said, all was well again.

Phyllis came to my aid again when I decided that I needed a steadier job. Miss Roberts had former students everywhere, and they all cared for her very much. She knew someone at the old Kearney Hotel, and so she accompanied me there and got me a job waiting tables for twenty-eight cents an hour plus tips.

At the end of my freshman year, Phyllis told me that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was running a NDEA language institute and that they were looking for native informants. At Phyllis' urging I sent an application, and I was hired for the summer. This experience allowed me to meet a professor who later recommended me for my present job at the University of Northern Iowa. This teaching experience convinced me that I wanted to teach French at the college level. Wisely, Phyllis convinced me that I should take all the courses required to teach on the secondary level in order to guarantee that I could get a teaching job upon graduation.

Jacques F. DuBois '63 ~ continued

The help and guidance that I received from Phyllis was endless. One of her former students, Leonard Skov, was the superintendent of schools in Wilcox, Nebraska. A former student and great admirer of Phyllis, he was easily convinced that his students would benefit greatly from the study of French and that I was the person to do the job. For the next two years, I drove to Wilcox twice a week and taught French to the third through eighth graders.

It would be difficult to list all of the ways that Phyllis Roberts helped me while I was a student. From inviting me for numerous dinners and home cooked meals to giving me gas money every time I took her grocery shopping to her recommending me to replace her when she took two years off to do her doctoral work at UCLA, Phyllis was always a kind, caring, and generous person. My experiences with Miss Roberts were not unusual as far as she was concerned because her career at the university was just a succession of students like me whom she guided, consoled, encouraged, and helped in every way possible. Her students were her extended family, and Phyllis was the mother hen—watching and often doing what the students' mothers would have done had they been closer.

With this statue Phyllis is indeed getting the recognition which she so deserves. Throughout her career she has epitomized everything that a teacher ought to be. Perhaps, somewhere on the campus of the University of Nebraska at Kearney, a student preparing to become a teacher will be inspired by this statue, will follow her path, and we will all be the better for it.

Jacques F. Dubois

Diane Blauch Foster '55

141 Hewett Road, Wyncote Pennsylvania 19095-1311

My gratitude for Phyllis Roberts, exceptional educator and human being, has not abated in these 45-plus years. I had transferred to then Kearney State for my senior year because York College (Nebraska) had folded. I had had three years of French—reading exclusively, zilch in conversation.

I enrolled in Miss Roberts' fourth year French class to complete my minor knowing how to speak one language, English! All others were immersed in French conversation only. I was just immersed—as in drowning. My French minor was a lost cause. Miss Roberts saved me. She devised an individual course of study for me to accommodate my attempts to communicate in French. Not only did she understand my pathetic French, but she also was *understanding*.

Diane Blauch Foster

Dr. Gale Fuller

5740 County Road 408, Fulton, Missouri 65251

Dear Miss Roberts,

Just a note to congratulate you for your long and dedicated teaching career. I was a student at Hastings High School when you were teaching there, and although I didn't have a class with you, I remember the help you provided to the drama club. I also remember how you would read palms which we students found akin to high magic. However, you looked at my palm and then wouldn't give me a "reading."

You were the Pied Piper for a large group of students as was Miss Lott Jo Oliver, and we marched to your magic flutes. I also remember that you attended one of our class reunions. It was, I believe, either the 40th or 45th reunion.

I was one of the fellows who enlisted in the navy during my senior year, so I was not present at graduation. After returning from the service I attended Hastings College, then earned my master's degree at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and my Ph.D. from the University of Wyoming. In 1996 I retired from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, ending 40 years of teaching psychology there. I also maintained a private clinical practice and, for several years, worked part-time at the local State Hospital. I mention my career to you because it was humanistic teachers like you that made teaching seem like a wonderful career, and I thank you for being one of two teachers awakening me to that possibility.

I want you to know that you had a much larger influence on me, albeit in an obtuse way, than you probably ever imagined. Enjoy your special day as you receive a tribute well deserved. I hope to see the statue of you sometime this summer.

With fondest memories and kindest regards,

Gale L. Fuller

Helen M. Harrington '80

1305 8th Street #309, Columbus, Nebraska 68601-7053

Everybody knows that Phyllis Roberts has a special place in her heart for former students. But Phyllis also loves dogs and adored my miniature silver poodle, Maggie. One evening when Maggie and I were visiting Phyllis, she decided that her little four-legged friend needed a haircut. So, there we were, the retired Kearney State English teacher and a 50-something Kearney State student grooming a poodle in Phyllis' kitchen. If dogs go to heaven, I'm sure that Maggie still remembers the patience and gentle touch of our hostess.

As a former student in Phyllis' English class at Hastings High School, I also have felt that gentle touch. She taught me so much, and I am very fortunate to have had her for a teacher and friend. Although Phyllis expected her students to study hard and reach their potential, she also was interested in them personally.

Following my graduation from high school in 1941, Phyllis and I went our separate ways and seldom saw each other for many years. What a joy it was to meet her again when I was a junior at Kearney in 1979! I graduated with a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1980. My favorite teacher and I had developed a lasting friendship, and I had experienced the most fantastic encounter with Phyllis!

Helen M. Harrington

*Margaret King Hezner '50**920 Barclay Circle, Lake Forest, Illinois 60045*

Dear Phyllis,

My junior year was approaching, and I needed one more course to complete my minor in English. I had completed 101, Journalism, and I knew how to spell Mississippi (MI double S I double S I double P I), and I felt after having C.T. Ryan, it might be nice to have another instructor. Rehearsals for the "Melody Three" (Margaret, Don, and Jack) were near your office, so I had become acquainted with you. I decided to delve into Shakespeare with you at the helm as I had heard you were a wonderful teacher, and "everyone" wanted to take the course. So, I registered.

You opened up a whole new avenue in my life, as I really enjoyed the class and began to develop an understanding of Shakespeare. In fact, in March of this year I attended *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the New Chicago Shakespeare Theater at Navy Pier. The theater is designed as a replica of the "Globe" in London. Wish you could have seen "Puck." He was delightful.

I am pleased that our communication lines have remained open through the years. Enjoyed our trip to Colorado, your trips to visit us, our lunches, and our visits. I wish the Chicago Alums of UNK could have been more successful, but I guess it wasn't supposed to be.

The dedication of the Phyllis Roberts Statue is a wonderful idea, and we are very excited about attending that special moment.

Love,

Margaret (King) and Gene Hezner

Dr. Patricia Kelly Hoehner '57

5820 Avenue O Place, Kearney, Nebraska 68847-1539

Dear Alumni Office,

I was delighted to learn that there will be a bronze statute to honor Phyllis Roberts who I feel was an outstanding instructor. My contacts with her date back to the late 50s.

Dr. Roberts taught a class on Shakespeare at Minden and invited me to ride with her to class. She had a unique slant on Shakespeare which I had found refreshing.

First of all, Dr. Roberts did an outstanding job of teaching Shakespeare, but I almost felt that I learned more about literature, French, and life on the trips to and from class. She had a genuine interest in her students and provided unlimited support.

Over the past decades I have had many instructors and even though they taught well, they were forgettable. Dr. Roberts is one of those rare educators who through her teaching truly touched lives forever. I am so pleased that she will be honored for her commitment to students.

Sincerely,

Patricia Kelly Hoehner

Judie Bator Johnson '62

1203 Ash, Coeur D Alene, Idaho 83814-3823

Phyllis Roberts was *the* influence in my deciding firmly to become a French teacher. She wasn't just our teacher. We were a family those four years, and Phyllis was the head of our household. She took a personal interest in all of our interests, in our relationships, and in us.

I think hers were the only classes I thoroughly looked forward to. Classes were interesting and fun, and *she* made them that way. Daily we heard stories and antics of her past delivered in a way that only she can do.

I don't believe I ever heard a negative comment cross her lips, nor was her mood ever negative. To this day, I receive long, hand-written letters from her which I truly cherish. She said her mother used to tell her often to make something of herself. Well, Phyllis, I'd say you far exceeded her expectations. Thank you so much for the education and your friendship.

Judie Bator Johnson

Roger Jones '65

Box 381, Minden, Nebraska 68959

As I reflect on my long association with UNK I always think of the people that have made this a very special place. Of course one person that always comes to mind is Phyllis Roberts. Phyllis is one of those unique people that could be your instructor, your friend, your mentor, and your adviser all at the same time. Through out the years Phyllis has been responsible for many students succeeding when they otherwise would have fallen by the way side. Although I never had the pleasure of having Phyllis for an instructor I remember hearing the wonderful stories about her caring manner and the great love shown between faculty and student.

As an Ambassador for UNK I have witnessed first hand her enthusiastic ability to excite alumni across the country. Almost single handedly Phyllis established and nurtured the Southern California Alumni Association. Because of her efforts we continue to have our largest alumni group working at full speed to further the message of UNK. There is no way we will ever be able to repay Phyllis for all of the hours and dollars that she invested in this and other projects across the country. It seems that "Thank You" is only too simple.

It is therefore appropriate that a former student, Paul Wagner, has seen fit to honor this wonderful lady with a bronze statue and garden area. Forever Phyllis will be a part of this campus that she has called home for so many years. Through Paul's generosity he has not only shown his gratitude for Phyllis but has memorialized the wonderful people that have made UNK the outstanding institution it is today.

Phyllis, I only have one regret on this wonderful occasion. I wish that some of our good friends that have gone before us could be here to enjoy this day. Congratulations to you on an outstanding career and a big "Thank You" for all that you have done for so many of us. We could not have done it without you!

Ron Kenney '50

151 Sir Thomas Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada 89110-4833

In 1947, there was a café across Ninth Avenue from the Ad Building. Several of us were having a coffee break—possibly skipping a dull class—when someone very tall, very big, a woman, sat down next to me. We chatted a bit, and she introduced herself as Phyllis Roberts, French teacher. Before the break was over, I had been recruited! I began my French studies the next semester.

For the next three years, I continued my French studies, and Phyllis became a good friend and counselor. She encouraged me in whatever I was doing, suggesting alternatives but never insisting. Through her I met John and Yvonne Korslund who were my hosts for dinner when I was visiting Paris in 1953 on leave from an Army post in Stuttgart. Hey, I had my first taste of oysters on the half-shell!

She has kept in touch all these years—a great letter writer! I got reviews of her travels, her work with alumni all over the country. I remember how proud she was to “walk the track” when she was given a Distinguished Service Award from the—was it the university then?

Phyllis Roberts was the first example I had of a teacher committed to her profession and to her students. Those teachers were very few for me, and she certainly influenced my decision to stick with the profession, even in those days of extremely low pay and hours of hard work.

I am fortunate to call her my friend, my mentor. Proud to have worked with her, for her.

I love you, Phyllis.

Ron Kenney

Marci Jo Nicodemus Lambert '57

3504 3rd Avenue, Kearney, Nebraska 68845-2814

Dear Phyllis,

I have very fond and vivid memories of what an influence you were on me during my years at Kearney State Teachers College which were 1954 through 1957. First, you were our sponsor for the Delta Pi Beta Sorority. We spent many (as I recall) Monday nights in your classroom for our meetings. With this association, and especially when I was president, we became really good friends and spent lots of time together. I remember coming to your second floor apartment on 26th Street and using the "little" kitchen to make something ?? for the sorority. We had many banquets and dinners together and, of course, the Holly Ball with all the decorations, etc. I love to hear the wonderful story you tell about how Norine (Wurdeman) Bydalek and I made the many pastel-colored flannel "Bunny Suits" and hats with ears for our sorority project, I presume which must have been to collect for Easter Seals.

Another highlight of my memories was the summer of 1955 when we both were on the KSC sponsored two-week trip to 13 Southern states and Cuba. Dr. Philip Holmgren was our tour guide and director. Others on the trip with us were Dagmar Naylor, Mrs. Bernice Mantor and Clara Ockinga, only to name a few.

My only class with you as the instructor was an off-campus course on Shakespeare which was held in Minden. This was one of the last classes I took to get my total hours for graduation.

With both of us continuing to live in Kearney, I have had the opportunity to visit you here and continue our friendship of some 45 years!!

Phyllis, you have been a wonderful inspiration to me as a teacher and friend. You have made so many wonderful contributions to the college and have influenced many students and their lives. This life size statue is a great tribute and honor for your many contributions to the university and to students.

Most sincerely,

Marci Jo (Nicodemus) Lambert

Larry W. Martin '48

402 E 10th, Cozad, Nebraska 69130

Phyllis Roberts touched so many lives, both at the college and in Kearney, in the many years she taught at the college and is still an inspiration to anyone she meets.

She is a goddess of tranquility and will be in our minds and hearts forever.

Larry Martin

Carole Anderson McCormac '57

2882 Salmon Drive, Los Alamitos, California 90720-4729

My first encounter with Phyllis was as a freshman at KSC. I found myself (A for Anderson) in the front row of Miss Roberts' Shakespeare class. Somehow, in some of the first of the year chats, I discovered that Miss Roberts was from my hometown of Hastings. It didn't take long for her to discover that this was my first adventure away from home and that homesickness could occur even 50 miles from home. In true Phyllis fashion she lost no time in talking one of the exchange students into driving us home for the weekend.

Phyllis and I became good friends many years later when she formed the Alumni Association of Southern California. She has spent several weeks with me over time to enjoy extra days in Southern California after the reunion was completed. I treasure her friendship and the times we have spent together. I am so glad that she is such an avid letter writer and collector of information. I can only add that her abilities to chat with people are only surpassed by her skill in keeping a cat entertained.

*Pat Caldwell Ricard '71**10 South 463 Windjammer, Naperville, Illinois 60564*

Dear Ms. Roberts,

It is with such great pleasure I write to you after seeing that you are to be honored with a beautiful bronze statue at the university—or good ole Kearney State, as I remember it! The statue is a wonderful likeness!

I am thankful to get a chance to write to you to tell you how you changed my life. When Hastings High School called you in the fall of 1970 to ask if you could recommend a French teacher, you mentioned my name. The job that I got at Hastings High School gave me a chance to take students on trips overseas. These trips led me to my husband who happened to be vice president of the company with whom we traveled. I moved on from teaching French to working for this company full-time. In the past 20 years, I have been responsible for helping to change the lives of thousands of students who have, in turn, traveled overseas with the company for which I work.

The experiences that you helped me have in college, the job you helped me to get in 1970, and the turns my life has taken as a result have enriched my life immeasurably.

Many, many thanks and lots of love to you. You made a difference.

Sincerely,

Pat Caldwell Ricard

Dr. Charles Skov '54

827 North 2nd Street, Monmouth, IL 61462-1229

My appearance, as a new freshman from a very small high school, in Miss Roberts' French 100 class was a direct result of Ron Kenney's enthusiastic and frequent admonition: "Whatever you do, take Phyllis Roberts' introductory French class at your earliest opportunity. I later realized that he had likely experienced a similar transition—and saw before him a kid with straw in his ears who would need gentle guidance adapting to a more competitive academic environment. Miss Roberts and French 101 certainly filled the bill.

I recall that there were a few callow freshmen and a somewhat larger number of sophisticated older women—sorority women—Deltas for the most part and all of 20 years! It was a pleasant and interesting experience. So much so that I managed to take a couple of upper level French courses during the balance of my time at KSTC. They were a most welcome diversion from the predominantly science and mathematics courses that occupied most of my time. And very useful, as it turned out, for I was able, seven years later when jumping through the hoops toward a Ph.D., to pass the reading exam in French on the first try after only a couple of days of review.

*Don V. Symmes '50**913 Lantana Avenue, Brea, California 92821*

I graduated with a BA in three years at Kearney, so I do not know whether I was a sophomore or a junior, but during my second year in college at Kearney, I was in one of Miss Roberts' classes. I had tried to enroll in a class taught by C.T. Ryan, one of my favorite teachers, but had to settle for a course taught by Miss Roberts. About the third day in her class I asked her if she could help me get in the class Mr. Ryan taught. She asked me why, and I told her that I just wanted out of her class. When asked why I told her that I was bored, and Mr. Ryan gave students a lot of work and graded tough. Her reply was that she had no influence to get me in the other class but would try to adjust her class to the way I described Mr. Ryan's class.

Near the end of the class that day Miss Roberts gave the class an assignment and then announced "we have one student who has requested more assigned work and diligent grading in this class. If any other students feel this class is too easy and that they need more assigned work, please let me know." After that announcement she continued to say, "Mr. Symmes you are a handsome and hard working young man (which embarrassed me), so add to the regular work just assigned three short original poems like the ones you print while I am lecturing in class." Poetry comes easily to me, and I really gave her the best I could do. I described three types of teachers, and with her good nature, she guessed the one describing her good nature. I enjoyed the remaining time I spent in her class and wrote a number of short poems while in class.

Don V. Symmes

Paul Wagner '58

105 Linden Street, Fort Collins, Colorado 80524

My first lucky break at Kearney State Teachers College in 1951 was to enroll in Miss Roberts' freshman English class. My academic background prior to that reveals the significance of being in her class.

After being, at best, an average high school student, I spent a year at the University of Nebraska Ag College in Lincoln. Upon admission I flunked the English entrance exam. Therefore, my first semester was spent taking 'dumbbell' English. The second semester included English for credit, where those able to get a passing grade received credit. Unfortunately, I was not one of those.

However, at Kearney State, through the skill of Miss Roberts, I not only took freshman English at the college level, but passed with a grade of 'B.' It would be an understatement to say that Miss Roberts' teaching was a very significant influence in my life. With the renewed confidence she instilled, I went on to minor in English.

In addition to leading me successfully through freshman English, she also took the extra steps of caring. After I had completed a writing assignment on my high school interests, she stopped me after class to talk. Before I realized her plan, she had personally walked me to Harold Ahrent's and Bill Lynn's offices, where they were instructed to utilize me in their speech and music programs.

The bronze commemorating Phyllis Roberts, entitled "Never Ending Are The Influences Of A Caring Teacher," has come about because of my positive experiences with Miss Roberts as a teacher and friend.

Paul Wagner

The UNK Southern California Alumni Association

Dear Phyllis,

For many of us in the Southern California Alumni Association, our introduction was when you came to California in 1975 asking us to attend an alumni gathering. With 15 volunteers, you helped the group get started with what has now been 25 years of luncheons, activities, projects and life-long friendships.

We certainly would not have succeeded with that first meeting if it hadn't been for your personal attention, and especially those phone calls telling alumni "they should be there." And for years, we so looked forward to your annual visits with us. "A little gossip from Phyllis" was always the highlight of our meetings.

You adopted our chapter like you adopted hundreds of students who were fortunate to have you as their teacher, friend, and mentor. You should take great pride in what you accomplished for the Modern Languages Department, the University and the Southern California Alumni Association.

We couldn't be more pleased for the recognition you are receiving. Having a statue on campus is perfect. You devoted your professional life to the university, and now you will have permanent presence there.

Our love and best wishes go out to you today and in all the days to come.

Southern California Alumni Association

Jim Rundstrom '64

9 Kings Court, Kearney, Nebraska 68845-4253

Dear Phyllis,

Unfortunately, I missed a wonderful opportunity when I was a college student. First, I didn't take French! And second, I wasn't in the Delta Pi Beta Sorority. I should have taken French, but I doubt the Delta's wanted a male in their presence. But, from my contacts with those involved in both of those activities in college (plus a lot more), I know I would have many more great experiences to share about our friendship.

I was lucky enough to find you later in my life when we were involved in creating alumni groups around the country. Thanks to your work, style, and connections with former students, the university launched a number of those groups. Now, many years later, we are deriving the benefits of those labors. The alumni in those organizations have made magnificent contributions to UNK in many ways. I am not sure it would have happened had it not been for your persistence and your way with people. The bond you established with students when you were teaching has been a bond that continues today.

I admire many qualities that you have, but I am constantly amazed at how much you genuinely care about people. You have cared about them all of your life, and everywhere I go, those whose lives you touched still remember that. The simple statement that Paul Wagner wrote for the plaque by your statue says it all – "Never ending are the influences of a caring teacher." It is a wonderful lesson for all of us.

You have been my true, caring friend since the first day I met you. That friendship has enriched my life enormously. I will never pass your statue without thinking about what you have meant, not only me, but to so many others.

Congratulations on a wonderful tribute.

Jim Rundstrom

As many of you know, a visit with Phyllis Roberts is always a special occasion. Of course, when you have a visit you need plenty of time. Actually, in my case it usually isn't a visit. I listen while Phyllis talks for a while. After she has exhausted her stories, she will say, "Jim, what shall we talk about next?" Today, it's my turn to tell stories.

In the Alumni House we have much that reminds us of Phyllis Roberts. She has been extremely instrumental in many of the things that have happened with the Alumni Association, especially in the 25 years since she retired. She was responsible for helping organize many of our alumni groups, served as our first and only emeriti secretary, and created a legacy with a variety of scrapbooks that tell much of the history of the university and people who were a part of it.

Whether it was Southern California, Northern California, Oregon, Chicago, Washington DC, our alumni meetings were a gathering of former students and friends of Phyllis. They came because she was a special person and a great story teller. A favorite part of those programs was always a little gossip from Phyllis. She would never let facts get in the way of a great story. Here are a couple of my favorite ones, always told with great affection.

Dr. William Bruner taught botany and other science courses. He was nearing retirement and walked rather slowly down the hall. A friendly former student of his met him and reached out his hand to shake Dr. Bruner's. It was obvious that Dr. Bruner didn't recognize him. Dr. Bruner said, "I just don't remember your name, but I do remember a weed you brought to class one day."

One fall, a tall, well-dressed fellow from Nigeria was registering for classes when Miriam Drake was assigned as his adviser. He told her he had gone to school in London, so English was hardly a problem for him. Even so, it seemed he was taking a long time to fill out the questionnaire. Miriam asked if he was having any problems, and he replied, "Only one, I just don't know what my maiden name is."

A story about art teacher Gladys Rose is one my favorites. Gladys was driving east on 25th Street when her car stopped. She tried several times to start it, but nothing happened. Another car came up behind her and the driver started honking at her. Finally, Gladys went back to his car and said, "Why don't you go and try to start my car, and I'll sit in yours and honk."

She has many, many more just like these.

We probably have a dozen scrapbooks she has compiled through the years – ones that continue to be tremendous resources. These scrapbooks say a great deal about the kind of person she is and why we are here to recognize her today.

Several scrapbooks contain information about former students and her many friends. She didn't just put the articles in the books, she would write comments like this was a student, her father and mother were students, I didn't have him in class but we were friendly (one

of her favorite terms of endearment). She genuinely cared about students when she taught and that interest has never waned.

One scrapbook is filled with notes, cards and myriad other things from her retirement after 28 years on the staff. One letter from a former student (who is here today, by the way) illustrates her special relationship with students.

"I remember on one occasion when I came to her class late, and she gave me that stern look. The only way I felt I could react was to put my arm around her and kiss her on the cheek. The stern look disappeared and her radiant smile surfaced. No one could ever have but the kindest feelings and warmest affection for such a lovely lady – an excellent teacher – a compassionate person.

As part of this celebration, we have compiled some letters from friends around the country. That collection is called Encounters with Phyllis. A few examples of what others have to say illustrates the deep feelings people have for her.

Because of her encouragement and expertise, I changed my major from math to foreign languages. Soon after taking several French courses, I began also with Spanish. I went on to get my master's in Spanish from UNK and have taught Spanish and French since 1970.

In 1947, there was a café across from the Ad building. Several of us were having a coffee break – possibly skipping a class – when this rather large woman sat down next to me. We chatted a bit, and she introduced herself as Phyllis Roberts, French teacher. Before the break was over, I had been recruited. I began my French studies the next semester.

I recall there were a few callow freshmen and a somewhat larger number of sophisticated older women – sorority women – Deltas for the most part and maybe all of 20 years. It was such a pleasant and interesting experience, so much so I managed to take a couple of upper level French courses. They were a most welcome diversion from my science and math courses. And very useful, as it turned out, for I was able, seven years later when jumping through the hoops toward a Ph.D, to pass the reading exam in French on the first try after only a couple of days of review.

From French 100 I learned the following: French is a beautiful language. I wanted to go to Europe, especially France. A black dress with a white collar is (shek) chic. Thank you, Ms. Roberts, for expanding my horizons.

Phyllis came to my aid when I needed a steadier job. Miss Roberts had former students everywhere, and they all cared about her very much. She knew someone at the old Fort Kearney Hotel, and so she accompanied me there and got me a job waiting tables for 28 cents an hour, plus tips. One of her former students was superintendent of schools in Wilcox. She convinced him that his students would benefit greatly from the study of French and that I was the person to do the job. For the next two years, I drove to Wilcox twice a week and taught French to the third through eighth graders.

It would be difficult to list all of the ways Phyllis Roberts helped me- from inviting me for numerous dinners to giving me gas money every time I took her grocery shopping. My experiences were not unusual as far as she was concerned because her career was just a succession of students like me whom she guided, consoled, encouraged and helped in every way possible. Her students were her extended family, and Phyllis was the mother hen – watching and often doing what the students' mothers would have done had they been closer.

A fellow faculty member wrote, Phyllis Roberts was a mentor to her students and colleagues long before the term became part of our workplace vocabulary. Every time I walk by the statue it brings a smile to my face.

Phyllis, this sculpture brings a smile to all of our faces. It will be a permanent reminder of the wonderful qualities you shared with all of us - the university, the Alumni Association and, most importantly, all your former students and friends. We all extend our congratulations.

If Paul Wagner and the Chancellor will come forward we will unveil the sculpture at this time.

*Never ending
are the
influences
of a caring teacher*

Program

Opening Remarks	Roger Jones <i>Vice President, NU Foundation</i>
Welcome	Gladys Styles Johnston <i>Chancellor</i>
A Sculpture in the Making	Paul Wagner <i>Class of 1958</i>
Former Student Response	Dr. Donald Deselms <i>Class of 1952</i>
Special Music	Amy, Faouza and Lisa <i>Introduced by Dr. Betty Becker-Theye Professor of Modern Languages</i>
Remarks	Phyllis Roberts <i>Introduced by Jim Rundstrom Executive Director, Alumni Association</i>